

MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

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No. 2

Henry Yother (1810 - 1900)

Mennonite Preacher and Bishop

Edward Yoder

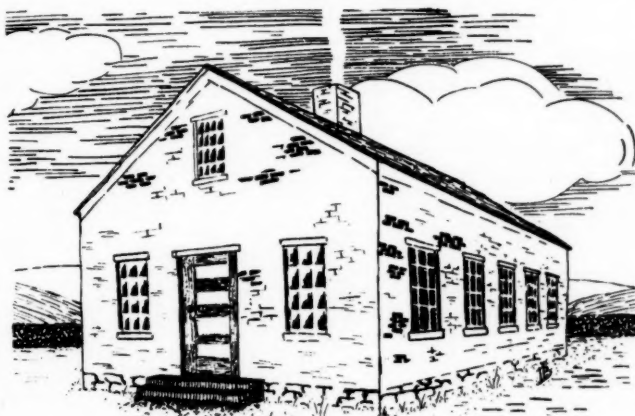
The subject of this sketch was born January 30, 1810, near Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania. His father, also named Henry Yother (spelled variously by members of the family as Yother, Yothers, Yoder), came from Bucks county to Westmoreland county, Pa., before 1800. He acquired a farm of 101 acres next to Mt. Pleasant, on a part of which the L. E. Smith Glass Company now has its glass factory. The senior Henry was a son of Jacob Yothers (d. 1829) of Bucks county, grandson of Casper (Jasper) Yoder (d. 1784), and great-grandson of Hans and Ann Yoder, immigrants from Europe in 1720.

Preacher Henry Yother was one of a family of ten children who grew to maturity. He united with the Mennonite Church at the age of 21 years. In 1834 he married Catharine Moyer (1818-1861), by whom he had twelve children. Three of the children died the same year as the mother. One son, Daniel of Blue Springs, Nebraska, is still living at the age of 88 years. After his marriage Henry farmed on his father's place for a time. Following his father's death, about 1846, the farm was sold to a Robert Hitchman. Henry then located three miles due south of his birthplace, across Jacobs Creek in Bullskin township of Fayette County. He bought 100 acres of excellent farming land from the estate of Christian Wertz in January, 1849. On this farm he lived for about seventeen years. In 1864 he sold the farm to George Myres for twice the sum he paid for it. It lay less than a mile northeast from the present Rice Schoolhouse and is now owned by Mrs. Mary Poorbaugh.

After disposing of his Fayette county farm Henry Yother with his motherless family moved to Livingston county, Illinois, near a place called Reading. There he bought a farm of 207 acres on which

he lived seven years. In 1871 he moved to Gage county, Nebraska, locating on a farm one and one-half miles west of Blue Springs. Four of his sons settled in the same locality. There he lived among them until his death, which occurred at the home of his son Isaac on April 18, 1900. His remains were brought to Scottdale, Pa., where funeral services were conducted by J. A. Brillhart, S. F. Coffman, and Aaron Loucks.

Henry Yother was ordained a minister of the gospel in September, 1845, while still living in Westmoreland county. Twelve years later, in October, 1857, he was advanced to the office of elder or bishop. He was chosen for these offices to serve the Mennonite congregation which



Mennonite Meetinghouse in Westmoreland County, Pa. (Stonerville), built in 1841, drawn from description. The house in Fayette County (Pennsville), built in 1852, was almost identical in construction.

then met for worship every two weeks alternately at the Stonerville and Pennsville meetinghouses. He was associate to the older ministers, Martin Loucks (1798-1869) and Bishop John D. Overholt (1797-1878). While Henry was living in Bullskin township he was about three and one-half miles from the Pennsville house of worship and about four miles or more from the other at Stonerville (now Alverton).

Little is known about Yother's early work as a minister. The early years of his ministry fell in that period when the Mennonite congregation in this section had already begun to decline due to various factors. Some of his contemporaries were leaving the congregation to cast their lot with other denominations. Many others moved to states farther west where land was cheap and plentiful. Yother was

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Custom-Built Coffins

(Reprint from *The Palimpsest*)

In most rural communities there are usually some farmers, men of more than ordinary genius and initiative, who develop interesting and profitable avocations. The Miller family, living about sixteen miles southwest of Iowa City, Iowa, possessed these characteristics.

Benedict Miller, imbued with the pioneer spirit of his ancestors in Pennsylvania and Maryland, moved from Ohio to Iowa in 1850. He was born in Maryland on May 20, 1815, and his wife, Barbara Gingerich, was born in Waldeck, Germany, in 1816. They settled near relatives along Deer Creek in Washington township of Johnson county. There Benedict not only managed a large farm but also tailored the clothes for his Amish neighbors and sawed the lumber for their buildings. His sawmill, driven by the water of Deer Creek, was an important community center for many years.

Benedict Miller's sons owned their farms and, like their father, found avocations that enabled them to serve their neighbors. Daniel became widely known as a sawyer and thresher. A younger son, John, owned a blacksmith and machine shop which drew patrons from near and far. The grandsons and great-grandsons have continued the family tradition of specialization. Among them are sawyers, cabinet makers, a well driller, a miller, two dentists, several physicians, and four doctors of philosophy.

Perhaps none of Benedict's sons occupied a more important place in the community than did Jacob, for it was he who made the coffins in which his neighbors were buried. He first began this service as a side line in his regular wood-working shop. In the early days his coffins were neither expensive nor elaborate. The first ones were usually made of solid walnut and occasionally of cherry wood. Bleached muslin without padding was used for lining. There were no handles on the early models, as they were carried with the aid of wooden bars. Later, when the demands for simplicity were no longer so exacting,

black handles were added.

The average price of a coffin at first was eleven dollars; later it went up to fifteen. After Jacob's son, Lewis J. Miller, took over the business, he charged thirty dollars for a coffin and ten dollars for a "rough box" or vault made of one-inch lumber. Finally, the price became fixed at forty dollars for the casket and twenty-five for the rough box.

In those early days bodies were not embalmed and so the coffin had to be built with the greatest possible speed. Usually boards of different lengths had been smoothed so that it was possible to complete the casket in a day. By the next morning, the varnish having dried, the casket was loaded on a spring wagon, covered, and delivered to the home where the dead body lay.

At first the one who came to order a coffin brought with him a measuring stick cut the exact length of the corpse. One time a rider, upon reaching Miller's residence, was very much perturbed because the mule he rode had just bitten off the end of the stick. In the Miller shop there are at present nearly fifty of these measuring sticks. On many of them information has been written. One stick, for example, is marked "Jerry Kauffman wife July 20, 1880 10 23 7½ 13 plenty high 12 will do." The stick was five feet six inches long. The coffin evidently was to have a head clearance of ten inches, widening out to twenty-three inches at the elbows and then tapering down to seven and one-half inches at the foot end. Later, strings instead of sticks were brought as measures of the corpses.

When, in 1940, the descendants of Joseph J. Swartzendruber met in reunion, the measuring stick for their ancestor's coffin was shown. A half dozen grandsons then compared their heights to that of the stick and discovered that all of them varied only slightly from the height of their grandfather.

As the years went by, the coffins lost some of their earlier simplicity. The rough boxes became heavier; one was ordered lined with tin to keep out the groundhogs. This request was prompted, no doubt, by the knowledge that bits of walnut wood had been carried to the surface of the ground from the dens of the groundhogs which were plentiful in the Lower Deer Creek Cemetery. The trustees of the church finally hired a veteran trapper and hunter, Barney Whetstone of Wassonville, to trap and shoot all the groundhogs in the neighborhood of the cemetery.

Jacob Miller made and sold over three hundred coffins and his son, Lewis, has made 144 to date. But the neighbors now very seldom purchase homemade caskets. Occasionally an old man places his order for his own coffin, but his family generally refuses to use it. Dr. Glen R. Miller, son of Lewis J., and the source of much of the material in this story, related that one such individual recently ordered his

More Family Histories

In previous issues of the BULLETIN brief mention was made of some family histories and genealogies published in recent years (See the BULLETIN for March and June, 1942). Below we list a number more of these publications, such as may be of interest to Mennonite genealogists.

Stricklers of Pennsylvania, A History of the Strickler Families who migrated from Switzerland and settled principally in Bucks, Lancaster, York, and Lebanon Counties in Pennsylvania, by Abigail H. Strickler, Jacob S. Strickler, Alice N. Strickler, Mame E. Strickler. Published by the Strickler Reunion Association of Pennsylvania (1942). Can be ordered from Alice Strickler, Mount Joy, Pa., or Mame E. Strickler, Hellam, Pa. Price \$4.00. The book has 420 pages, eight illustrations, but no comprehensive index.

The "Sensineys" of America, compiled by Barton Sensenig, Philadelphia, Pa. (1943). This is a genealogical record of those who spell the family name variously as Senseny, Sensenig, Sensenich, Senseney. Two brothers, Christian and Jacob, who were Mennonites, are known to have reached Pennsylvania early in the eighteenth century as religious refugees. Their descendants are traced in outline in this book of 159 pages. There is no index. To be obtained from the compiler at 201 W. Mt. Pleasant Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

A History and Genealogy of the Slonaker Descendants of America Since Early 1700. Compiled and Edited by James Rollin Slonaker, Ph.D., Lyday Printing Co., Los Angeles, Calif. (1941). This volume gives information concerning all the families of this family name, including extensive records from many sources. There are 732 pages, including an index.

All Leatherman Kin History, A brief history and a partial genealogical record of Leatherman families and their descendants in the North American continent, with records of wills, transfers of real estate, and special activities in the lives of some of the subjects, with portraits and other illustrations. Compiled by Rev. I. John Letherman, Wakarusa, Indiana, in collaboration with Emma Leatherman Candler, Marietta, Ohio. Published by E.V. Publishing House, Nappanee, Ind.

coffin and then declared, "And I'll see to it that they use it!"

In the Amish community between Sharon Center and Kalona, Iowa, homemade caskets are still used. On funeral days one can see a light wagon carrying a covered coffin proceeding down the road toward the cemetery. Following the wagon will be the many buggies of the relatives and friends who at the cemetery will pay their last respects to the departed one.—Melvin Gingerich, in *The Palimpsest*, published by the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

iana (1940). This is a comprehensive work of 1152 pages, with 95 illustrations and several indices.

Alexander Mack the Tunker and Descendants, by Rev. Freeman Ankrum, Masontown, Pa. Besides the genealogy this book contains considerable historical information on the founder of the Brethren Church and some of his prominent descendants. In certain sections some of the descendants intermarried with Mennonites, hence Mennonite family historians may find material here that will interest them too. The volume has 352 pages and ninety-four illustrations, but no index. The price is \$2.75, and it may be ordered from the author.

Family Record of Daniel J. Borntrager and His Descendants, by Sam R. Borntrager and daughters Mary and Katie, Fairbanks, Iowa (1941-1942). A record of the family of Daniel J. Borntrager (1842-1922), 123 families being listed. There is an index.

Family Record of Daniel J. Gingerich and His Descendants, by Nettie Beachy, Wellman, Iowa (1930). This book of 58 pages lists 132 families descended from Daniel J. Gingerich (1818-1877). There is an index.

Daniel Schlabach Family History, Descendants of Daniel Schlabach and Sally Kaufman, by Emanuel J. Miller, Box 20, Wilmot, Ohio. The subject of this family history lived 1827-1888 in Holmes county, Ohio. Some data are also included on the families of the father (Jacob Schlabach, 1786-1863) and the grandfather (Christian Schlabach, immigrant from Europe in 1820) of Daniel. There are 32 pages with an index.

Family History of Joni Miller and His Descendants, by Emanuel J. Miller, Box 20, Wilmot, Ohio (1942). The subject of this history lived 1824-1913. Over five hundred families of descendants are listed. There is also valuable information on the ancestors of Joni Miller, who are traced back to Samuel Mueller, immigrant of 1763. The book has 123 pages with an index.

Family History of the Descendants of John F. Miller and Magdalena Miller, Emanuel J. Miller, Box 20, Wilmot, Ohio (1943). The subject of this history lived 1820-1906 in Holmes county, Ohio. Information on his ancestry is also given. Five hundred seven families of descendants are listed and there is an index. The book has 105 pages.

HENRY YOTHER

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deeply concerned for the welfare of the church of his choice and he labored diligently to build it up. He preached in the English language as well as in German. He was earnest and evangelistic in his preaching, he studied the Scriptures intently and memorized extended portions which he quoted freely from memory in

his preaching. He also traveled extensively to visit other congregations of his faith.

Of his earliest travels for preaching the gospel there are no specific records left. Many of his later travels are recorded or mentioned in the *Herald of Truth*, first published in 1864. On the first trip of his mentioned in the new periodical he preached at Elida, Ohio, and at sundry points in Indiana and Illinois. That was early in 1864. The scattered and isolated Mennonite families in the states on the western frontier, of whom there were many, seem to have been his special concern. Regular and stated series of evangelistic meetings were then unknown among Mennonites. Visiting the churches and scattered members in that period meant the holding of a few meetings at a place in a church or schoolhouse or in private homes, and usually also the conducting of communion services with the shepherdless members. Henry Yother did much of this type of church work in the course of his long ministry. During the seven years he resided in Illinois one reads of visits made by him to various counties in that state, also to Page county, Iowa, Morgan county, Missouri, points in Indiana and Michigan, and several trips to his old community in Pennsylvania. Usually he conducted baptismal and communion services, and on numerous occasions was instrumental in ordaining officials for the smaller congregations in the west.

After moving to the state of Nebraska Yother was not officially connected with any particular Mennonite congregation. No such congregation was located near the place he lived. Nevertheless he continued to be active in traveling over the plains as visiting preacher to minister to the spiritual needs of the Mennonite pioneers of those places. The earliest Mennonite settlements in Kansas were greatly helped by his zealous and self-sacrificing labors. His services were much appreciated by the isolated members. Traveling often with a horse and two-wheeled rig he made numerous trips to McPherson and Marion counties in Kansas during the 1870s, as well as to points in eastern Kansas and western Missouri and Iowa. He was present at some of the earliest sessions of the Kansas-Nebraska Mennonite conference and was instrumental in bringing about its organization. He was always ready to preach the gospel wherever there was opportunity to do so. He reported preaching among the Amish Mennonites in Nebraska not far from his home, and also among the Russian Mennonites who were then forming extensive settlements in his part of the state.

In those early days the traveling and visiting ministers had to pay much or all of their expenses from their own pockets. There was no organized financial support for this kind of work. About 1882 an Evangelizing Committee was formed at Elkhart, Indiana, for the purpose of collecting some funds to pay part of the expenses of these visiting ministers. This

committee early in its history arranged with Henry Yother to spend some time traveling among the churches and visiting scattered members. He was qualified for this work, they stated, because he preached in both English and German, and furthermore he had no congregation of his own to look after, and his children were then grown and no longer depended on him for their support.

The first of Yother's extended missions under the direction of the Evangelizing Committee took place in 1884. He left his home early in May of that year and did not return until in November. He visited and preached in many communities of Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri. At some places he held regular series of evangelistic meetings for several weeks in schoolhouses. At many places he conducted communion services where there was no resident bishop. His itinerary on this trip can be readily followed from the notes and reports published in the *Herald of Truth* during that year. Of this trip Yother wrote: "I traveled in the name of Jesus in connection with the Old Mennonite Church of which I am a member over 53 years."

In May, 1885, Yother left home for another prolonged evangelizing trip. This time he journeyed through Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and western Pennsylvania. Extensive reports of his labors can be found in the pages of the *Herald of Truth* for the years 1885 and 1886. He did not reach his home again until in July, 1886. Occasionally an extended letter or article from him appeared in the *Herald*, and these are uniformly marked by an earnest tone of evangelistic and missionary zeal.

The later years of his life Yother did not travel so extensively, though he continued to preach for small congregations not too far from his home. In 1892 he was reported as preaching every three weeks in Nehama county, Kansas. The small congregation in Page county, Iowa, enjoyed his frequent visits and pastoral care. When past eighty years of age he retained his rugged bodily vigor, so that when on one occasion he missed train connections he did not hesitate to walk over twenty miles carrying a heavy satchel to reach his appointed place to preach.

Henry Yother was not as talented a preacher and leader as were some of his more outstanding contemporaries in the Mennonite Church of the last half of the nineteenth century, ministers like J. F. Funk, J. M. Brenneman, John S. Coffman, and others. He nevertheless worked closely with these leaders and labored with zeal and earnest devotion in the work of the Lord. His faithful service filled a real need in the frontier settlements of Mennonite families and congregations. His name deserves to be remembered among those who served the Mennonite Church in his day and generation.

Note: The writer is indebted to the following persons for information included in this article: Daniel Yother, Blue Springs, Nebraska; Frank Yothers, Connelville, Pennsylvania; Anna Yothers, Mt. Pleasant, Pa.; I. Erwin Yothers, Perkase, Pa.

NEWS & NOTES

The Yoder Mennonite Church, located near Yoder, Kansas, observed the 25th anniversary of its organization on April 6-9, 1944. The series of week-end meetings which marked the occasion were a combination of Passion Week services and a homecoming fellowship with past members of the congregation. Various speakers reviewed the history of the Yoder church, from the first opening of Sunday school in March, 1918, and the organization of the congregation with sixty charter members on Good Friday of 1919, down to the present time. The congregation has a present membership of a little over three hundred. The great majority of the members have been drawn from the congregations of the Old Order Amish who began to settle in Reno county, Kansas, in the 1880s.

Kenneth E. King, local historian of the Yoder Mennonite Church and a son of its first pastor, L. O. King, had printed for the occasion of the abovementioned anniversary a booklet of 34 pages, entitled "History of the Yoder Mennonite Church." In this he has told in concise form the story of the founding of the congregation, its subsequent growth, and its present work. The booklet contains also a half dozen illustrations and is a valuable little brochure.

Harold S. Bender, secretary of our Mennonite Historical Committee, served as president of the American Society of Church History during the past year. At the meeting of the society, on December 28, 1943, in New York City, he gave his Presidential Address on the subject, "The Anabaptist Vision." In this address he interpreted for church historians the early Anabaptist movement and its significance in history. This address was published in the magazine *Church History* of March, 1944 (Vol. xiii, pages 3-24). It is reprinted in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* of April, 1944. Copies of this number of the *Review* can be obtained from John C. Wenger, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, for the price of fifty cents.

The book *Mennonites in Europe*, by John Horsch, was published in 1942. The edition of 2,000 copies has found a ready demand and is now nearing exhaustion, less than one hundred copies being still in stock. The Mennonite Historical Committee has recommended that a second printing be made of this valuable book with certain slight revisions and additions in the interest of the book's completeness and greater usefulness. Numerous appreciative reviews of this book have appeared in journals outside of Mennonite circles.

The writing of the companion volume to the book just mentioned, to be entitled
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RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Mennonite Origins in Europe, By HAROLD S. BENDER. Published by Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pa. 1942, 71 pages. Price 20 cents.

This is the opening number of a series of study booklets on Mennonites and Their Heritage. It deals chiefly with the beginnings of the Mennonites in the countries of Europe. The three parts of the booklet cover a wider scope than that: A. The Soil Out of Which Grew the Life of the Mennonite Church. B. The First Mennonites and Their Faith. C. The Experiences of the Mennonites of Europe to the Present Time.

The author, who has a keen insight into the history and faith of the Mennonites, has here presented a brief yet intelligible survey of this large field. The student or reader will get a clear-cut view of causes that led to the rise of the Mennonite Church and of its history for over four centuries in Europe. The author in preparing this book drew considerable material from John Horsch's book, *Mennonites of Europe*. The booklet breathes a spirit of deep devotion to the faith of the Mennonite Church and enthusiastic appreciation for the martyr courage of the men and women who have lived out this faith under difficult and trying circumstances. Young people will enjoy reading this booklet. Study classes in local congregations will find it a useful beginner's textbook in the subject of Mennonite History.—E.Y.

Mennonites in America, by C. HENRY SMITH. Published by Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pa. 1942. 72 pages. Price 20 cents.

This is a seventy-two page booklet of the same series as the above. It deals in a brief way with the history of the Mennonites during the two hundred fifty years they have lived in America. The author has accomplished a difficult task in condensing this history within such a small compass. Two main divisions are found in the booklet: A. How the Mennonites Came to America and Where They Settled. B. One Vine but Many Branches—Origin, History, Peculiar Emphasis and Contributions of the Various Mennonite Branches. In a clear way the several tides of Mennonite and Amish Mennonite immigration to the American continent are outlined, together with the story of how the main settlements were formed. Very helpful for members of all the groups of Mennonites is the brief and sympathetic treatment of the various branches of the Mennonite Church that is given here. From it one can gain an intelligent understanding of the main reasons for the existence of these branches, which will do much to help him appreciate groups other than his own. Like the above, this booklet will be valuable for general reading in the

home and as a textbook for class study.—E.Y.

The Story of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Lithographs by C. H. DEWITT, text by ANN HARK. Harper and Brothers, New York, 1943. Price \$1.00.

This beautifully illustrated work of 32 pages, is really a work of art that adds much to the text. Every page of text has a number of black and white drawings and there are fourteen full-page color lithographs. These are fairly accurate in depicting details of dress, house furnishings, activities and religious practices of the Pennsylvania Germans, particularly the Amish and the Mennonites.

The author, Ann Hark, presents in story form a series of fifteen brief descriptions, of early life among the Pennsylvania Germans. Her choice of words is excellent. The wealth of information packed in these stories reveals a broad knowledge of backgrounds. Her treatment of the subject also displays a deep appreciation of the spirit of these people, and their contribution to American life today.—Quintus Leatherman.

NEWS AND NOTES

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Mennonites in America, has been assigned to Harold S. Bender. According to present plans he will be employed by the Mennonite Publication Board and will spend the summer of 1944 in the writing and preparation of the manuscript for this book. It is hoped that the revised reprint of the Horsch volume and the first printing of Bender's volume can appear together within the next year. The increased publicity Mennonites have been receiving of late as conscientious objectors to war and as leaders in civilian public service projects has created a growing demand for authoritative books on Mennonite history and life.

The book *Menno Simons' Life and Writings* was published in 1936 as a quadricentennial tribute to mark the four hundredth anniversary of Menno's renunciation of Roman Catholicism. The original printing of this book has been sold out and the Mennonite Publishing House is now preparing a reprint edition of two thousand copies. The demand for this book, which contains only brief selections from the writings of Menno Simons, is evidently enhanced by the fact that copies of the complete works of Menno in English are no longer available.

The Mennonite Historical Committee at its meeting in March, 1944, recognized and discussed the urgent need for a new and revised edition of the complete writings of Menno Simons in the English language. The only English edition of his complete writings ever published was printed at Elkhart, Indiana, in 1871. It was a translation made directly from the original Dutch language, from the edition of 1681. It served in its day very well but is now out of print. There is need

for a fresh translation to be made from the original Dutch for the benefit of the present English-speaking Mennonites and others. It is hoped that this need can be fulfilled before too long.

John Umble has made detailed studies of numerous early Mennonite settlements in the state of Ohio. Recently he began the publication of a series of articles on "Extinct Mennonite Churches in Ohio," in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. The first of these, entitled "The Church in Williams County," appeared in the issue of January, 1944. Another on "The Church in Wood County" appears in the April, 1944, issue. The author has gathered very detailed information on the early families who composed these now extinct congregations. Besides the story of these former congregations, the detailed information renders the articles valuable for those interested in family history and for those who are investigating the history of Mennonite settlements in other states.

The Mennonite Historical Committee has been generously favored with a donation of one hundred dollars this year from the Mennonite Publication Board. The committee is highly grateful for this donation. Among other things it has voted to spend one hundred fifty dollars this year for some necessary work in further organizing and cataloging the Church Archives at Goshen, Indiana. Other donations from interested friends are needed for the work of the Committee in promoting the historical work of the church.

The appeal to members of the Mennonite Historical Association to contribute five dollars or more for a Sustaining Membership for 1944 has brought a generous response. Twelve members have already sent in the Sustaining Membership fee for this year. Others are still invited to do so. We thank all who have sent in membership dues for this present year, both regular and sustaining members. Those who have so far put off sending their dues are urged to do so at once.

New members who have recently been enrolled in the Mennonite Historical Association are the following: Elizabeth Frye, Goshen, Indiana; Ida M. Yoder, Wadsworth, Ohio. We welcome them as supporters of the work of the Historical Committee.

Become a Regular Reader of the Bulletin

If the Bulletin does not come to your address at present, we invite you to send in the fee of one dollar a year for regular membership in the Mennonite Historical Association. The Historical Bulletin is sent regularly to all who enroll as members in this Association, which is sponsored by the Historical Committee of Mennonite General Conference. Send your membership application and dues to the treasurer, Edward Yoder, Scottdale, Pennsylvania.

